

WHAT'S YOUR TIN CAN

HOW TO DEAL HEAD-ON WITH THE CHALLENGES IN LABOUR MOBILITY



By Jim Carroll

After 100 years of using tin cans, StarKist introduced tuna in a re-sealable plastic pouch. \$200 million of new revenue later, they've realized the benefit of aggressive change and innovation.

So it is with the issue of skills access today throughout the corporate sector – it is now driven by a wide variety of significant trends that impact labour mobility, including off-shoring, cross border challenges, and ever-increasing skills shortages.

It's time to turn these trends into opportunity! My message is this – opportunity comes from your ability to innovate and change, adapt and evolve, as the very foundation of the workforce and corporate world around you continues to evolve at a furious pace.

What's with the tin can?

The tin can change is a big change – and it took a long time to come

about. And the fact is, this new tuna pouch provides a good segue into what is perhaps one of the most important leadership issues that you must deal with – getting out of a “tin can rut,” in order to deal head-on with the dramatic challenges that surround the world of labour mobility today.

How many of you are stuck in a 110-year-old rut? Still delivering a tin can day in, day out, with no desire to change? At the same time, dramatic change envelopes you: ever more significant cross border challenges; the emergence of a global labour market in which human capital is becoming a simple commodity; the migration of ever more skilled white collar work offshore; and signs of an impending skills crisis as a result of various demographic trends.

There's a lot of change, and it can be rather difficult to cope with. It's easy to lose your drive, your courage to go forward, and your willingness



to change. You might still be thinking tin cans, when everyone else around you is taking a look at the new re-sealable pouches, and are trying to comprehend what it might mean to the issue of labour mobility.

That's why the StarKist story is so important. Here's an organization that has somehow shaken away the complacency that enveloped it for over a century. It has woken up to the opportunity that comes from real innovation, and from embracing change.

That's your key leadership challenge today, and one that you must begin to manage, before it begins to manage you.

An action plan for change

Rapid times require bold change; action is critical. Thinking differently about what you do is often the first best step to adapting. My advice is simple:

Forget everything you know. Relearn – quickly. The pace of evolution of knowledge is now so quick that entire careers and industries are changing faster than ever before. Consider this: it is said that 65 per cent of the kids in preschool today will work in jobs that don't yet exist. Statistics like this clearly indicate that knowledge is momentary – learn to grab it when you need it, and don't assume that what you know right now will have any relevance tomorrow. Your job from this moment forward is to learn, continuously and relentlessly, about

the new challenges that surround you, and how you can adapt to them.

Get young. Throughout the next year, take the time to listen to young people – anyone 10 years younger than yourself, or even more. They're building the future right now, and you'd do well to understand it. You won't survive in their future if you don't take the time to understand what they are doing, talking about, and thinking.

Appreciate wisdom. At the same time you listen to young people, be patient with anyone 10 years older than yourself. They might not "get it," and you might find their aversion to change to be frustrating, if not infuriating. The fact is, they possess something that you might not yet have – experience, and the wisdom that comes from "having been there." Your impatience for change might delude you into thinking that things are far easier than they really are; they know better, and have the battle scars to prove it.

Forget permanence. Everything is transient. Get with the program – everything is temporary, and change is constant. Accept that, and the rest comes easy, since it will help you to focus on what needs to be done, rather than looking back at what was done.

Make decisions. Don't be someone who asks, "what happened?" – make things happen.

Change your focus. Old glories and corporate nostalgia won't define future success – aggressiveness and adaptability will. Stop thinking about the past, and how wonderful and easy the world used to be. Instead, focus firmly on the future, and the challenges and opportunities that exist. The most important trait that you can work on developing through the next year is becoming more forward-oriented, so that you can spot the trends, opportunities and challenges that will define your future.

Trap creativity. It surrounds you, and it's a precious resource. The ideas, thoughts, and initiatives of those who surround you can be your most potent weapon. In '05, place less emphasis on innovation-killing buzzwords such as "compliance", "risk management" and "accountability." Re-adapt the buzzwords that count: "brainstorming," "innovation" and "risk taking". We've become far too focused on managing instead of growing, and to deal with the rate of change that surrounds us, we must get back onto a growth agenda.

Think "clear and present opportunities." Don't focus on the negativity of change – which is all too easy to do.

Get excited – be happy. Studies show most people don't like change. But if you change your attitude, you'll find that things really can improve. The next year is full of opportunity, and it's yours if you want it!

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How do you do this?

Adopt ten simple words that will help to get you into the right frame of mind.

Observe. Take the time on a regular basis to look for the key trends that will impact the world of labour mobility. Far too many organizations sit back after a dramatic change and ask, “*what happened?*” Make sure that your organization is one that asks, “*What’s about to happen, and what should we do about it?*”

Think. Analyze your observations: spend more time learning from what you see happening around you. If you are like most organizations, you are responding to trends on a short term, piecemeal basis: you are reactive, rather than proactive. Step back, take a deep breath, and analyze what trends are telling you. From that, do what really needs to be done.

Change. In a time of rapid change, you can’t expect to get by with what has worked in the past – tin cans won’t help you – you must be willing to do things differently. Abandon routine; adopt an open mind about the world around you. The world is changing at a furious pace whether you like it or not. Take a look at how you do everything – and decide to do things differently.


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Dare. Have you lost your ability to take risks? Maybe so – yet risk-taking is critical to innovation and change. Work with a few of the new technologies, and try them out. That's the only way that you will be comfortable with what comes next.

Banish. Get rid of the words and phrases that steer you into inaction and indecision: "We can't do that." "It won't work." "That's the dumbest thing I ever heard." These are the innovation killer phrases – watch for

them, and don't permit them to be used.

Try. How many of your people have lost their ability to adapt to changing circumstances because they've lost their confidence? Developing new skills and career capabilities is critical, given the rapid change occurring around us. Yet too many people have managed to convince themselves that they can't adapt, they can't change. Don't let that happen – it's one of the worst attitudes for going forward into the future.

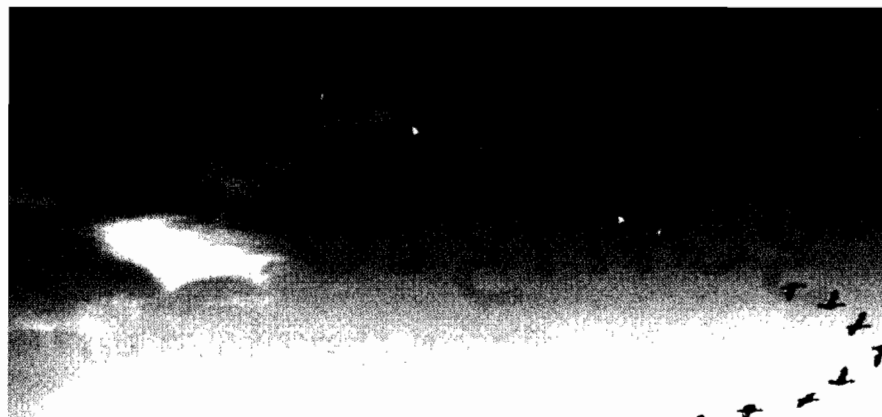
Question. Go forward with a different viewpoint by challenging assumptions and eliminating habit. If your approach to the future is based upon your past success, ask yourself whether that will really guarantee you similar results in the future. If you do certain things because "you've always done it that way," then now is an excellent time to start doing them differently.

Grow. Stop focusing on cutting costs – build your business instead. Don't stand in fear of what you don't know – teach yourself something new. Don't question your ability to accomplish something great – grab the bull by the horns and see what you can do! The point is, in a world of rapid change, you must continually enhance your capabilities and opportunities through innovative thinking. Change your attitude now, and the rest will come easily.

Do. Renew your sense of purpose, and restore your enthusiasm for the future by taking action. Too many organizations, and the people who work within them, are on autopilot. They go into work each day, and do the same things they did the day before, with the belief that everything today is the same as it was yesterday. It isn't.

Rapid times require bold change; action is critical. Confront your tin cans, and you've got the right leadership frame of mind to take you into the future.

Jim Carroll, a futurist, trends and innovation expert, is the author of the book, What I Learned From Frogs In Texas: Saving Your Skin Through Forward-Thinking Innovation. He is recognized worldwide for presentations that involve his signature humor, high-level energy, deep insight and challenging observations, and will be a featured speaker at the 2005 CERC Conference, October 23-25 in Niagara Falls, Ontario. Jim can be reached through his website, www.jimcarroll.com.



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